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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to assess the characteristics, experiences, and activities which are related to the perceived leadership abilities of college of education students at Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia. A survey of 170 education majors was used to gather demographic and leadership data, with each student responding to 40 statements that rated their own motivational, management, interpersonal, and communications abilities on a six-point scale. Over half of the 40 items received mean ratings above 5.0, with none less than 4.26. These results indicated that the education majors surveyed felt that they possessed high levels of leadership ability. Stepwise regression procedures revealed that a significant portion of the variance associated with the Management of Self factor and the Interpersonal Relations factor was explained by the respondent's gender. Apart from gender, none of the other demographic characteristics had a significant influence on leadership factors. Includes recommendations for further research. (Contains 21 references.) (MDM)

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Experiences Related to the Leadership Skills of College of Education Students

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Experiences Related to the Leadership Skills of College of Education Students

Introduction

Leadership has been an element in organizational, scientific, and technological development throughout human history. Earliest opportunities for leadership primarily available only to the aristocracy have now given rise to anyone with the need, desire, and ability to lead. History shows that leadership can be directed toward worthy or unworthy goals (Walters, Wilmoth, and Robinson, 1991).

The term leadership has been addressed under a variety of philosophical predispositions and orientations. According to Eisenhower (Larson, 1968) "Leadership is the ability to decide what is to be done and then get others to want to do it" (p. 21). However, the question of "what is leadership" has been asked for many years. Leadership has been defined as "the means by which one or more persons aid a group in setting and attaining desirable goals" (Krietlow et. al., 1965 p. 57). Willis (1974) defined a leader as a person who has the ability to get others to act in a certain and definite way. Leadership defined by Brinkley and Byers (1982) is "the ability and readiness to inspire, direct, and influence the actions of others" (p. 84). Leaders were once thought to have been born, not developed, summoned to their calling through some enlightening process. This belief was commonly called the "great man" theory (Bennis & Nannus, 1985).

Supporting Literature

According to Binkley and Byers (1982), "Members in student organizations have made splendid opportunities for engaging in good

democratic leadership", (p. 199). But, students may need training in performing the duties expected of them as leaders.

Hohmann, Hauker, and Hohmann (1982) supported the needs of adolescents and democratic style of leadership, reporting that "young people acquire leadership skills through group membership and ... dynamics of cooperation" (p. 613) as reported by Seering (1978), Future Farmers of America (FFA) provided training for officers and members benefiting them in achieving leadership goals: "It is becoming more important everyday for our ... leaders to communicate effectively" (p. 179) as well as to demonstrate leadership through goal setting and self motivation, pride, and enthusiasm.

Six leadership traits identified by Hall (1979) that are necessary to, and fostered by, the leadership experience of editing a college newspaper included: (a) delegating authority, (b) developing subordinates, (c) motivating others, (d) being approachable, (e) commanding respect, and (f) bringing out optimal performances in others. Youngs (1983) reported that healthy and productive organizations required integrative leadership and that growth and development were facilitated by the presence of values such as trust, cooperation, consensus, caring authenticity, purpose, support, mutuality, and reciprocity. Moreover, to the degree these characteristics were persistently reflected in leadership behavior and personality, they become role expectations for leaders.

Fitzpatrick (1976) advocated organizational leadership training for Vocational Industrial Clubs of America (VICA) students in which students take part in meetings, make speeches, chair meetings, assist in solving problems at the group level, vote on issues concerning the organization and participate in skilled competition. Historically, students have learned leadership skills at the local, district, state and national levels through

purposeful development of citizenship and competition skills. In 1987, Health Occupations of Students of America (HOSA) reported a total of 21 competitive events in which students at both the secondary and postsecondary level could participate (National HOSA Handbook, Section II, 1987).

Findings by McKinley, Birkenholz, and Stewart (1992) indicated that College of Agriculture junior and senior level students perceived themselves to have greater leadership skills in the areas of interpersonal relations and management of self than in the areas of administration and communication skills. Their study also revealed that junior and senior students who were older, female, or members of a foreign language club perceived themselves to have greater interpersonal relation skills.

An important finding by McKinley, Birkenholz, and Stewart (1992) was that the leadership skill statements in the category of communication skills tended to receive lower mean ratings than any other categories. Statements in the communication skills category receiving the lowest mean ratings (scale 1-6) were: Leads group discussion (3.68); community involvement (4.00); and belongs to organizations (4.27).

Numerous studies have been conducted to evaluate the results of leadership development programs (Howell, 1974; Martin, 1977; Miller, 1976; Grebrink, 1975). Each of these researchers reported that the programs were successful in meeting their intended objectives, but few evaluated the leadership qualities of participants prior to formal leadership development activities (Luft, 1986). Luft examined the perceived leadership abilities of young adults in North Dakota. He found a significant difference in leadership traits of respondents when grouped by gender and by educational level. Luft concluded that educational attainment was a primary indicator

of individual leadership ability. However, he was unable to identify how educational experience contributed to the development of leadership abilities.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to assess the characteristics, experiences, and activities which are related to the perceived leadership abilities of College of Education students. This study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the demographic characteristics of senior students enrolled in the College of Education?
2. What are the perceived leadership abilities of senior students enrolled in the College of Education?
3. What demographic characteristics account for the variance in perceived leadership abilities of College of Education seniors?

Significance of Study

If student leadership skills are to be developed by College of Education faculty and programs, it is important to know what experiences students already possess, how experiences and activities students possess relate to leadership, and what the faculty can do to encourage, promote, and facilitate leadership skills. If student skills are important, an underlying assumption is that college of education faculty and administration must either identify, select, and enroll students who already possess leadership skills or develop leadership skills in students enrolled.

Research Procedures

Population and Sample

The accessible population for this study was all senior students

enrolled in the College of Education at Marshall University during the Summer semester of 1993 (n=300). A current mailing list was obtained from the Marshall University Computer Center which served as the frame for the study. According to Krejcie & Morgan (1970), a representative sample for a population of 300, within a five percent margin of error, was 170. A random sample (n=170) was generated from the list of College of Education senior students.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

The data collection instrument was a revised version of the instruments used by Luft (1986) and McKinley, Birkenholz, and Stewart (1992). Part one consisted of demographic information. Part two consisted of 40 statements reflecting leadership characteristics. Respondents were asked to indicate their perceived leadership by indicating their level of agreement most descriptive to their feeling toward the statement. Available responses were on a Likert-type scale as follows: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = moderately disagree; 3 = slightly disagree; 4 = slightly agree; 5 = moderately agree; and 6 = strongly agree. The revised instrument was validated following a review by a panel of experts in leadership development. Reliability was estimated on the 40 leadership statements in part two of the instrument by calculating a Cronbach's coefficient alpha of .92 following data collection.

After two follow-up efforts, useable data was returned from 70% (119) of the respondents. Non-response error was controlled by comparing early to late respondents as suggested by Miller and Smith (1983).

Analysis of Data

Data were analyzed using SPSS/PC+ statistical package. Frequency counts, percentages, means, standard deviations, factor analysis, and

stepwise regression analysis were used to describe the data. The alpha level was established at .05.

Findings

Demographic Characteristics

Respondents were asked to respond to questions seeking information regarding selected demographic characteristics. Table 1 reveals the results of that information. A total of 92 percent of the respondents were in age categories between 20 and 34 years of age. Only three percent were 40 years old or older. Females (79 percent) represented a larger percentage of the sample than males (21 percent). Over two-thirds (70 percent) of the respondents had never been married, 25% were married, and five percent were divorced. A majority (61 percent) of the respondents resided in a town or city.

Insert Table 1 about here

The ethnic makeup consisted of 95% (114) whites and 5% (5) nonwhites. Nonwhites consisted of: Native American (3), and African-American (2). Almost two-thirds (62.0 percent) of the respondents worked 11-40 hours per week while in college.

Leadership Abilities

Research question two of this study sought to determine the perceived leadership abilities of senior students enrolled in the College of Education.

Respondents rated their perceived abilities above the midpoint on a 1 to 6 Likert-type scale. Over half of the 40 items received mean ratings above 5.0 on the six-point scale. Principal components factor analysis

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents.

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Age		
20-24	95	80.0
25-29	11	9.0
30-34	3	3.0
35-39	6	5.0
40 and over	4	3.0
	119	100.0
Gender of Students		
Female	94	79.0
Male	25	21.0
	119	100.0
Marital Status		
Married	30	25.0
Never Married	83	70.0
Divorced	6	5.0
	119	100.0
Current Residence		
On Campus	7	6.0
In the Country	22	18.0
In the Town or City	72	61.0
Other	18	15.0
	119	100.0
Ethnicity		
Black	2	2.0
Native American	3	3.0
White	114	95.0
	119	100.0
Number of Hours Worked Per Week While In College		
Less than 10 hours per week	45	38.0
11-20 hours per week	25	21.0
21-30 hours per week	23	19.0
31-40 hours per week	26	22.0
	119	100.0

with varimax rotation was used to group the 40 leadership statement in factors. The analysis resolved the 40 items into 10 factors as reported in Table 2. A factor is a set of individual questionnaire items that coalesce into an entity on the basis of their intercorrelation, presumably on the basis of their conceptual similarity. Varimax rotation yields relatively discrete factors. The solution is shown in Table 2.

Factor loadings ranged from .56 to .79. According to Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Grablowsky (1979) loadings of .30 are to be considered significant, loadings of .40 more significant, and loadings over .50 very significant. As indicated above, it is presumed that factors are held together by an underlying theme or concept. This underlying theme provides the basis for their naming. The 10 factors in this solution were named as follows:

MOTIVATE OTHERS, INSPIRATIONAL, DECISION MAKING, SUPERVISORY SKILLS, MANAGEMENT OF SELF, ADAPTABLE, COUNSELING SKILLS, INNOVATIVE, INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS, AND COMMUNICATIONS.

Insert Table 2 about here

Means and standard deviations were calculated for each of the 40 leadership statements. The "Motivate Others" items produced a mean factor score of 4.89 with a standard deviation of 0.60. The other factor means and standard deviations were: Inspirational, 4.87 and 0.75; Decision Making, 4.88 and 0.70; Supervisory Skills, 5.41 and 0.48; Management of Self, 5.50 and 0.48; Adaptable, 5.26 and 0.89; Counseling Skills 5.20 and 0.82; Innovative, 5.21 and 0.52; Interpersonal Relations, 5.45 and 0.39; and Communications 4.98 and 0.61, respectively.

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations and Factor Loadings for 10 Leadership Factors (n = 119, 40 items)

Factor/Item	*Mean	S.D.	Factor Loading
Motivate Others	4.89	0.60	
I can motivate people.	4.93	0.74	.77
I am able to persuade others to respect my point of view.	4.91	0.76	.69
Other people accept my ideas.	4.86	0.74	.67
I am willing to take charge and lead a group.	4.85	0.92	.72
Inspirational			
I am able to inspire people.	4.87	0.75	.74
Decision Making	4.88	0.70	
I am an effective decision maker.	4.97	0.93	.60
Other people accept me as a leader.	4.79	0.86	.75
Supervisory Skills	5.41	0.48	
Other people depend on me.	5.70	0.57	.54
People look to me for advice.	5.27	0.76	.70
I view myself as a professional.	5.25	0.78	.63
Management of Self	5.50	0.48	
I feel I am proficient in my work.	5.52	0.62	.66
I consider myself to be an achiever in life.	5.51	0.67	.78
I can work persistently for a just cause.	5.50	0.60	.62
I am enthused about my work.	5.42	0.77	.60
I stay with a project until it is completed.	5.49	0.69	.60
I enjoy success and strive for it.	5.39	0.71	.67
Each year brings me closer to my professional goal.	5.25	0.78	.66
Adaptable			
I consider myself to be a flexible person.	5.26	0.89	.64
Counseling Skills			
People seek guidance from me during difficult times.	5.20	0.82	.74
Innovative	5.21	0.52	
I believe that my ideas are practical in nature.	5.27	0.67	.56
I am original in my ideas and activities.	5.14	0.71	.71

Table 2. (continued)

Factor/Item	*Mean	S.D.	Factor Loading
Interpersonal Relations	5.45	0.39	
I like to see conflicts resolved.	5.82	0.40	.61
I understand that others have feelings, motives, goals.	5.72	0.53	.71
I have a good sense of humor.	5.61	0.59	.61
I willingly listen to others.	5.61	0.58	.62
I am a cordial person.	5.33	0.72	.62
I feel people respect and admire me for the person I am.	5.30	0.75	.67
It is easy for me to develop an interest in people.	5.27	0.87	.75
I can see both sides of an argument in question.	5.24	0.88	.59
I consider myself to be tactful.	5.13	0.86	.58
Communications	4.98	0.61	
I like to maintain good interpersonal relations.	5.54	0.69	.65
I enjoy sharing information with others.	5.53	0.67	.78
I enjoy meeting new people.	5.41	0.90	.79
Making friends/getting along with others is easy for me.	5.28	0.98	.72
I enjoy expressing my ideas on given issues.	5.12	0.89	.69
I encourage others to become involved in various projects.	4.98	0.92	.58
I feel confident about openly promoting issues.	4.80	0.95	.71
I feel at ease leading a group.	4.67	1.14	.68
Belonging to organizations is important to me.	4.26	1.33	.75
I am involved with community affairs.	4.26	1.16	.62

*Scale

Strongly Disagree = 1 Slightly Disagree = 3 Moderately Agree = 5
Moderately Disagree = 2 Slightly Agree = 4 Strongly Agree = 6

Leadership abilities associated with the Management of Self Factor and Interpersonal Relations factor were perceived to be greater than those associated with the other factors presented in Table 2. The leadership skill statements in the category of Management of Self receiving the highest mean score ratings were: I feel I am proficient in my work; I consider myself to be an achiever in life; and I can work persistently for a just cause. The highest mean score ratings in the Interpersonal Relations category were: I like to see conflicts resolved; I understand that others have feelings, motives, goals; I have a good sense of humor; and I willingly listen to others.

The Communications category had the two lowest mean ratings for leadership skill statements when compared with the other categories. Statements in this category receiving the lowest ratings were: I feel at ease leading a group; Belonging to organizations is important to me; and I am involved with community affairs. Other categories with low mean ratings were: Motivate Others, Inspirational, and Decision Making.

Variance Associated With Leadership Factors

Stepwise regression procedures revealed that a significant portion of the variance associated with the Management of Self Factor and the Interpersonal Relations factor was explained (6.9% and 6.8%) by the respondents' gender as reported in Tables 3 and 4 respectively.

Insert Table 3 and 4 about here

Apart from gender, none of the other characteristics (age, marital status, current residence, ethnicity and number of hours worked per week while in college) explained a significant portion of the variance associated with

Table 3. Stepwise Regression Analysis of Student Characteristics On Management of Self Factor (n = 119)

Source of Variation	ss	df	MS	F - ratio
Regression	91.230	1	91.230	8.647
Residual	1234.349	117	10.550	
Total	1325.579	118	101.780	

Variable(s) in the equation

Variable(s)	Multiple R	R^2	Sign. F
Gender	.2623	.0688	.004

Table 4. Stepwise Regression Analysis of Student Characteristics On The Interpersonal Relations Factor (n = 119)

Source of Variation	ss	df	MS	F - ratio
Regression	101.092	1	101.092	8.543
Residual	1384.370	117	11.832	
Total	1485.462	118	112.924	

Variable(s) in the equation

Variable(s)	Multiple R	R^2	Sign. F
Gender	.2609	.0681	.004

the following leadership factors: Motivate Others, Inspirational, Decision Making, Supervisory Skills, Adaptable, Counseling Skills, Innovative and Communications.

Discussion and Conclusions

A typical profile of a College of Education senior would be female, single, currently residing in a town or city, is 24 years old or less, is employed 10 or more hours per week while in college, and is a white American. These findings supported Luft's (1986) findings pertaining to the leadership abilities and biographical characteristics of young adults.

College of Education senior students felt good about their leadership abilities, especially in the Management of Self and Interpersonal Relations categories. The mean scores indicate the responses agreed moderately to strongly with the statements. The communications category had the two lowest mean ratings for leadership skill statements when compared with the other categories. This substantiates McKinley, Berkenholz, and Stewart findings.

This study was unable to identify demographic characteristics which could explain a major portion of the variance associated with student leadership abilities. Gender accounted for a relatively small amount of the variance on the dependent variables (Management of Self and Interpersonal Relations).

Implications

Why are some students successful leaders? These results offer a possible explanation for student affairs professionals, student development educators and practitioners seeking to understand why some students fail at leadership.

Leadership is complex. There are no simple answers as to what set of

characteristics is most likely to be associated with high perceptions of leadership.

Recommendations

Based on findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are suggested:

a. College of Education students perceived their leadership ability to be weakest in the categories of Inspirational, Decision Making, Motivate Others and Communications. Leadership programs should be conducted to provide opportunities for students to develop in these areas.

b. The leadership skills statements which the College of Education students perceived themselves to be lowest in should be given the greatest amount of attention in a leadership development program.

c. Students should be encouraged to participate in activities and organizations which develop their communication skills. If their ability to lead a group and their ability to conduct the work of organizations is improved, students may feel that it is important to become involved in community affairs.

d. There are many possible directions for future research on this topic. Further investigation of factors accounting for additional variance in the experiences related to the leadership skills of College of Education students needs to be undertaken.

e. It might be useful to conduct a qualitative study to see if these mean ratings can be substantiated by observing or evaluating these student leadership abilities in real life roles.

f. An indepth study should be conducted to determine if the number of hours worked per week while in college; has an effect on the level of participation in leadership activities/organizations.

g. Are senior students in College of Education working in leadership related jobs (part-time/full/time) while attending college? This might be worthwhile investigating

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